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The Story of a Fortunate Youth

THE STORY
of a
FORTUNATE YOUTH

Chapters from the Biography
of an Elderly Gentleman

By
JEAN KENYON MACKENZIE



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To
My Mother

PREFACE

THE old gentleman of whom there is account in this little book has had many more adventures and adventures more impressive than are here recorded. Of this I am assured by himself and by his friends. It seems a pity, say his friends, that there should be no place in a book about him for the honors he has received, the benefits he has conferred, and the friendships he has made. There is so much more to tell about him, they claim, than I have told.

This omission of notable events is much to be regretted. It is true of the old gentleman that he has lived an honored and a crowded life. Many a one there is to tell you that. But of the events recorded in the following pages there is only myself to tell you. There is none other who has counted over so exactly the little treasure of coins that were the fortune of his youth. And this book is no more than a purse in which they have been laid away — a kind of savings.

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THE STORY OF A FORTUNATE YOUTH

THE BOY AND THE BAWBEE

I

THE old gentleman claims that many years ago his name was Rubie. And that this was not at all a romantic name, but just a nickname. And that he, who dresses like any other decent body nowadays, did the same in the eighteen-fifties. He wore a kilt, a wee bit shirt, a velveteen jacket, and a Glengarry bonnet. His galluses were latched to his kilts with a wooden pin. There were pockets to his jacket, and into one of these he put a bawbee when he had one. And the first bawbee ever he had he found in the dust of a long summer day.

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You would never guess, unless the old gentleman told you, how the Highlands of Scotland are continually bathed in summer. They are like those happy countries you may see from the peep end of an Easter egg. And more than anywhere the long summer day hangs upon the coast of the North Sea and about the neighborhood of the Moray Firth. Yes, that is the sort of day they have, and in the last light of any one of them you may see little boys drifting home from golden adventures to their beds in the villages of Ross and Cromarty.

On a Saturday afternoon the boys have been, as like as not, to Jerry's Den. It was there that the bawbee of which we are told was found in the dust. A bawbee is a halfpenny, so called because, when Mary Queen of Scots came to the throne as a baby, — or what the Scotch in their own tongue call a “bawbee,” —

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a coin of that value was struck with her image. And between a little Scotch boy and a bawbee there is to this day a thrilling affinity. There is in this matter a permanent devotion, a quest, and a recurrent adventure. Some little boys achieve bawbees and some have these thrust upon them, but I will tell you at once that the best bawbees are found. If on the coach road, says the old gentleman, you find a snail's trail in the dust, you follow that silver lead into the grass where you find the snail, and then you twirl it three times about your head. This is a charm with intent to find presently a bawbee.

But on this long summer day the bawbee just came to hand without aid of snail or other magic. And it did not at first seem, says the old gentleman, to be his own. He put it in the pocket of his jacket, provisionally, and not meaning

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to use it; but — in tumbling — out it fell upon the ground, and there was another boy shouting that “Rubie has a bawbee and will buy the sweeties”; which he then did. This was the beginning of a beneficent custom always encouraged by his hangers-on, and instituted, as I now see, with his first fortune.

His second fortune was earned, and in foreign parts. A sister took him across the Cromarty Firth to see his granny. The most gilded climate is not flawless, and there came a storm upon that little boat in that narrow sea-way. The old gentleman remembers that he then made his first prayer: “O Lord God of Israel!” he prayed, — neither more nor less, — and came safe to the other side.

Here among the hills was a sheiling where his granny lived. There were three rooms in this cabin, — a bit and a ben and a room atween, — and oh, such

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cosy windows! Very wee they were, because windows were taxed; but the chimney was not taxed at all, and that was big and with an ingle.

His granny was in bed; she wore a white mutch, and if you will believe it, she did not know his name! He could read, which she could not. She asked her daughter in Gaelic, could he repeat the Twenty-third Psalm; and this he did for her in the English tongue. Whereupon from under her pillow she took a knotted handkerchief, and from this with her old hands she took a white shilling.

Lord God of Israel! A fortune, and all earned in the high way of Religion. But there is this sad difference between a bawbee and a shilling: you buy sweeties with the one, but you take the other to your mither.

Rubie's mother was from Forres way.

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She taught her little boy to write with the sharpened handle of a pewter spoon, and this she did that he might write her letters to his father, who was away at work in the North. He was a millwright. This was the time of the Corn Laws and the Irish Famine and Richard Cobden.

The old gentleman tends to wander from Rubie at this point; he grows historical and geographical and pedantic, until we drag him back to the day when there was no dinner. We remind him that once he came home from the Dame's school and "there'll be no dinner the day," says his mother. Rubie takes what measures he may — he lies face down across a chair, on the principle and for the reason that a hungry man tightens his belt. The clock strikes two and Rubie looks it in the face. "What's the use of striking two,"

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he asks of that mechanical perfection, “when there is no dinner?” And I suppose he wrote his father on that day with a clean, clean pewter spoon.

Other letters he wrote, coming on to be eight years old, for other women to other men, and for each he was paid tuppence. The serving-maids in the farms round about would send for little Rubie, and on a Saturday — a lang simmer day — he would be writing letters for one and another in garret rooms under the eaves. The service-bell would ring, and the maid would run to answer; the scribe would be left to wait, and to look about that little room. I fear he fingered what he saw, for he has a most exact remembrance of a maid who had a pot of pomatum on her dresser, — “Cream of Roses,” it was, — and the scent of it, the first scent ever he savored, was as fine as the name. There was,

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besides, a bottle of hair-oil, scented too. Tuppence he was paid for the letter he wrote on that day; and he claims that he can see the young girl speaking, after these more than sixty years, and that he can feel himself writing: "I send you my love and if I was writing myself I would say much more."

II

He claims further that his next job brought him in sixpence a day, his board, and a pair of rubber boots. In those lang simmer days he herded cattle and silly sheep on the flanks of the Soutars of Cromarty, among the prickles of the whins where a little lad might well prize his rubber boots. A sixpence a day we think to have been an excessive wage, but he holds to it and pretends to have had butter to his bread — that was an oat-cake or a disk of barley baked and

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rolled up. Some days there would be a Swedish turnip, and, in their season, wild berries, and — oh, sweetest bite! — a potato baked in the embers of a little fire among the whins or the heather, and none the worse for the ashes.

The luck of some folk is too much for lesser folk to bear, and this little boy with his bit fire and his spud in the ashes and his buttered oat-cake, and his wild honey from the ground and his whistle that he made from willow, — and all among the golden whins of the lang simmer day, — how we envy him! We cannot rob him of one hour, but we take away the sixpence. Sixpence, we say, can never have been paid to a silly little shepherd in rubber boots, so long ago and so far away. The wage, we say, is excessive. The buttered cake, the whistle he brags of, and the honey harried from the bees' bike in the mossy ground — who are we,

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to know the makings of these? But a sixpence we know, and how it is made. A sixpence a week we will allow him, and no more. That is silver enough for a lad who, by his own count, has every other sort of fortune.

But, he argues, all the other shepherds get the sixpence! For there are more little shepherds lolling about in the heather on the hillsides — a whole union of them — who will not work for less than sixpence, who will not work indeed at all, but who eat their honey and pipe on their whistles and read the “Leather-Stocking Tales” and “The King’s Own” — and some of whom will come, long after, to fall from the ranks of that same regiment into Egyptian graves.

Yet here they all are in the lang simmer day, at a sixpence apiece! For a drink of milk they will bless you: “God bless your cows, goodwife, and would you

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be giving us a drink of water?" "Bide a wee," says the goodwife; and they bide a wee, the rascals, till she comes from ben the house with a pitcher of milk.

The old gentleman claims to have invented this blessing himself, so you see how clever he was at a sixpence a day.

III

Yes, he was clever, terrible clever; do not think to keep up with him, for now he is a tutor. From being a piping shepherd, he has become a tutor and has the Latin. That's him, with the Latin, going through the snow to the shepherd's cabin in the hills. Thirteen years he is now, and terrible wee he is, too, but there is no help for that. He must just face the driving snow in the morning moonlight, and keep close on the heels of the old shepherd, whose body is a wall against the stour, until they come to the sheiling

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where the children are just longing for their tutor with the Latin.

There were four of these, and a great girl who had for her own the wisest of collies. Aye, after many a year we remember that girl and that dog — the one whistling her orders from her father's door to the other across the valley, where he stood upon a rock among the heather — whence he sprang away to herd the straying sheep he could not see. Wise as Solomon, he was, that dog!

They were great dancers in that house. By the firelight and the light of a little pear-shaped iron lamp that hung from the lintel of the fireplace, its wick of rushes fed with whale-oil, they danced to the piping of one of themselves. And all those nights of dancing — there were three winter months of them — were embittered for the little tutor by this: there was a tear in his jacket. A many a time

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in my life he has told me of this tear: that it ran down the front of his coat; that he was always mending it with a pin he had; that, whenever he swung about in the fling of the dance, the rent part of the coat stood out at right angles. He was never so ashamed in his life, he says. There is nothing for it now, I know, but to let it go at that; but I ask about the big young shepherdess and the other women of that family — could they not have mended up their little tutor and so have saved his freckled face? “They were ungracious,” says the old gentleman with reluctance, and upon revisiting in his mind that group under the whale-oil lamp.

And presently, he tells me, they would have prayers after the dancing, in Gaelic, each child reading in turn his verse. And then to bed in bunks under the eaves, with warm blankets and feather pillows.

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So the torn jacket is forgotten until another evening. And never to be forgotten, as you see for yourself; always to be hanging where we would come upon it now and again, and remember the piping and dancing, and the "Hieland pride" of a little homesick boy.

Fifteen shillings were the three-months wage, and the little tutor took them to his father. He came down from the hills to the village where his father was working at his trade. There was himself at the bench, in his long linen apron. I know that his nickname was Winter, but it was not his children who gave him that name. On this day when he saw the fortune of shillings in that little fist, he met the unique hour with an uncommon grace. Deliberately he sat himself upon his bench; he threw his apron over his shoulder that he might come the more easily at the pocket in his waistcoat; he thrust his

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fingers into that pocket, and he brought out his snuff-box. A pinch of snuff he took himself, and then, as man to man, he offered the box and the quill to his boy. As if that little tutor were Hugh Miller or any other of his father's honored cronies. This incredible condescension was not marred by any words.

And I will tell you about the son of wise old Winter, that he ripened more in that silence than in a month of summers. Not a long silence it was, with fifteen shillings on the bench between them, needing care. A sixpence was for Rubie, and "the rest you 'll take to your mither."

Which he did. And many a bawbee of his own earning has slipped through his fingers since then. An inveterate giver-away he is, in the manner of old Lear. But the snuff-box he has not given away; no beggar of all his begging children has

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begged of him the snuff-box. It is on the chimneypiece of his house; and I think it is for him and for them a kind of symbol of a happy sacramental hour, or the instrument of a humble accolade.

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I

THE old gentleman and I often walk abroad in a rural district where there is a taciturn blacksmith. The old gentleman always maintains an illusion of a chat with this man. "I 'll be having a word with the smith," he tells me, "while you wait outside."

I sit upon a fence near that open door where the tinkle and the clank of the smithy is audible, but never a word from the blacksmith or his guest. Presently out comes the old gentleman, very bland and entirely satisfied with his social adventure. There is nothing so uplifts him as a chat with a blacksmith. And this is because, long ago, when his name was

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Rubie, he being then about thirteen years of age, the old gentleman worked in a smithy.

This was in a village near Cromarty among the East Highlands of Scotland. It was a kind of three corners of a village, full of important houses, and the smithy, at the time that Rubie worked there, was really most important. Everyone used to call upon the blacksmith. This is the origin doubtless of the old gentleman's sense that the least you can do for a smith, if you pass his way, is to call upon him.

The youth of Rubie's day, in making these calls in the village of three corners, invariably hung about and made itself handy, holding horses' feet for the shoeing, or taking a turn at the anvil. And this for the many pleasures of the delicious atmosphere in that smithy — of a deliberate and deft business going

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forward there, and the blooming and the fading of the flame and of the glowing metal. But Rubie, besides his share in these unparalleled pleasures, received a shilling a day for what he did. And this is what he did: he was salesman, and he took shoes off the horses' feet. He would take the horse's hoof upon his knee, declares the old gentleman, looking at us with eyes in which we seem to see how big was the horse with his hoof on the knee of little Rubie. And he would pry off the shoe. And there was a mate of Rubie's, little like himself, and about the same business of shoeing horses, on whom the horse, growing restless, planted his hoof, and the boy died. This tale, never told us but once, seems to emphasize the enormous size of the horses treated by little Rubie; seems to account for the shadow of their size which is in the old gentleman's eyes when this phase of

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blacksmithing is dwelt upon. But in the main you feel, in his account of this epoch, the thrilling sense of the dusk of that interior, smitten with the erratic light from the forge and peopled with young visitors.

The shilling, of course, says the old gentleman, was given to his mother. Now there is nothing to us "of course" in this monotony of deposit. We think, and we say so, that a shilling should have bought his way into other of the important houses in the three corners. And in a second-hand way, he agrees, it did. There was the grocer's house: he would be sent there for bread and for fruit. Oranges from Spain were there at threepence, nuts were there from Brazil, Zante currants, and sticks of black sugar. "Boys bought sticks of black sugar, you know, flattened with a seal at one end." We don't know; we feel it to be very

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thrilling, and are much disillusioned when we learn that black sugar stamped with a seal is just nothing but licorice. We think it not at all exotic; but the old gentleman thinks as Rubie thought of black sugar.

The grocer, we infer, was nothing much to remember. He was just a creature behind a counter, who took your pennies and gave you in return currants dried in southern suns. The butcher, too, was another featureless man from whom you bought meat twice a week. Fishwives were more real, because you tormented them, for all your mother chid you. They were of another tribe, coming to the village from Cromarty with their creels strapped to their backs, and with a sailor's superstition that, if they were counted, one would be lost. With this dreadful fate hanging about them, they yet walked single file. They were always

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counted. And they had a fishwives' dialect especially fitted to this crisis. These tormented and violent strangers were important as a kind of foreign spectacle and a diversion; not as fellow creatures, certainly not as individuals.

The keeper of the public house was important as an individual. And his house, on the west side of the post road, was important. But Rubie was never, in the whole course of his life, under the roof of the public house, because at the most tender years this little lad became a teetotaler — and this to the great disgust of the more conservative of his relatives, who could not abide a taste so fancy or a will so weak that it must sign a pledge. Terrible proud it was, to be a teetotaler, a thing of the south entirely, brought up to the Highlands by the Big Beggar Man, as Thomas Guthrie was called in those parts. And Rubie was his victim. Under

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this taboo he missed all the fine talk of the men from the hills who would be visiting the public house for a dram. Yes, there would be fine talk in that house, which was a kind of exchange for the news of the countryside. The missing of it was a great loss, and is still to be regretted.

As for the publican himself, he could be seen in church — the Free Kirk, that was at the other end of the village from the Established Kirk. Rubie, sucking a peppermint in the pew beside his mother, saw him every Sunday. He was the precentor. He had a wart on the top of his head. There is a high note in the tune of "Dundee," and in other lofty tunes, which he could not reach and to which he pointed in the upper air, clearing his own throat and leaving the commoners to climb. Little Rubie saw the wart and the uplifted hand and heard

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the coincident cough, sitting by his dear, dear mother in the pew, on all the Sundays of his youth.

II

For nine months of the year he worked on the six week-days from six to six, and in the three winter months he went to school. We worm this out of him. Rubie kneeling under the bellies of horses in the smithy is much to the fore; he crowds little Rubie at school. And yet, now that you mention it, Rubie at school had adventures, too. There was a teacher, of course — you would guess as much; and he was a “stickit minister,” of course, and you would guess that, too. He wore a white cravat and a silk hat. The boys called him “Ability.” He was not married. He taught forty or fifty children the three R’s, and algebra, history, Latin, and geography — “all those

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things, you know," says the old gentleman rather casually. And Rubie was never touched by the tawse. That was a five-fingered leathered thong. Once, indeed, he was rapped by the bamboo cane that was always at hand. If you will believe it, that blow was not deserved; the old gentleman says so himself. He claims that he felt on that day his first keen sense of injustice. We are terribly pleased with this tale: it seems to discover for us the origin of certain inhibitions on the part of the old gentleman in his relation to his own children.

In those days, he claims, he had high marks. And dwell upon this, — he drives us to it, — he was a terrible little fighter! Aye, that he was. New boys of his own age must have horribly regretted their rash entry to that school, where the invincible Rubie must be met. Not only with both hands, mark you, but with his

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left hand tied, yes, or with his right hand tied — with any or all of the classical handicaps, the battle could have but one issue, and — “Well, they seemed to have a good deal of enthusiasm about me,” says the old gentleman, in whom the enthusiasm obviously survives.

It will never do to let him go in this uplifted mood with his face of false humility, — you see that for yourself, — and we make him tell us about the murder of the witch in the West Highlands. We know the power of that tale to bring him down. For it seems that on a day like another day the teacher rapped upon his desk, and when all those little ruddy faces looked his way, he blanched them with news. He had had a letter from his brother who was a minister in the West Highlands, and in that savage country they had accused a poor body of witchcraft; they had dug a hole in the ground

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in which they had then buried the poor woman to her neck. She died. It was a dreadful thing, the master told his children, to have come about in a Christian country. And little Rubie felt a shadow fall upon him and a tribal shame. To this day he will urge that such doings were unknown in the East Highlands.

There was in that school a girl called Euphemia. This was her name, her little indestructible name, not worn away or dimmed at all by the sixty-odd years that it has jingled in the pocket of the old gentleman's memory. And she was the first girl ever he kissed. He remembers that, too; it is a brilliant little memory not dimmed. All old gentlemen — don't doubt it — have these bright names and these little bright first kisses perfectly preserved in the vest-pocket of their memories. This first kiss of which I am telling you was stolen, though `Rubie

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thought that he had bought it with a turnip. He gave her a turnip and he took the kiss, thinking it was understood. But no, it was not understood: Euphemia struck him for his daring, with the very turnip, and he saw stars. We think the fault was in the bribe — that it was inadequate; but the old gentleman says, indeed not. A sweet turnip right out of the field — and they together on the way from school, and hungry, too — was a perfectly adequate bribe. And that there was a farmer's boy in school who was competing for a prize that went by vote of the pupils, and he used dried peas for his bribes. He was always bidding for votes with peas, and Rubie voted for him entirely on the basis of peas.

We think this very low of Rubie; but perhaps, we think, it would have been different had the peas been money. Rubie then would have detected the vice

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of bribery. "If it had been money," we ask him, "how would it have affected you?" and are much relieved when he claims that money must be earned. Peas, he says, are different.

Well, there you have him, and are prepared for the following tale. From a blacksmith Rubie has become a ticket-agent in a railway station. This is what he was next. And from fourteen or so, he has become sixteen or seventeen. He sits on a high stool, and that is a good way to be taller than you are. And he sells tickets out of an office-window, for the North Shore and Western. Very important. Everybody knows him. And one day the agent, whose character never quite emerges to us, is speaking with a youth of the gentry about a young lady, also gentry, who is seen by them and by Rubie to go into the waiting-room. And the young buck of the gentry then

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told Rubie that he could win a half-crown if he would kiss that young lady.

“I got immediately off my stool,” says the old gentleman, “and I went to where she stood, — where they could see her as she stood, — and I said to her, would she excuse me, but that I had been told that I could win two-and-sixpence if she would permit me to kiss her. Immediately she stooped down,” — Ah, Rubie, that she had to stoop! — “and she laid her arms about my neck and kissed me. And so I got the two-and-six.”

We gape at the old gentleman with his “immediately.” It is to us the most bald, incredible tale. How could it be? But it was, says he, and is about to remember her name, when we tell him not to. “Did you feel hot or anything?” we ask. But he says no, not at all, and that it was for him purely a matter of business, of two-and-sixpence — a half-week’s wages!

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“How about her,” we ask; “how could she?”

“Oh, well,” says the old gentleman, “they all bought their tickets of me, they all knew me!”

The logic of this consequence of habitual ticket-buying is confusing to us, but not to him: he looks at us out of the old ruddy face that was once the young ruddy face of Rubie, with Rubie’s bland calm. It begins to be evident that for a half-crown Rubie might go far. And yet — there is the affair of the penknife.

An important person is known to have offered Rubie the ticket-seller a tip of two-and-six. Rubie refused it. And the important person then asked a favor of Rubie. You know how, when strong characters refuse our favors, we are impelled to lean upon their strength. This important person yielded to that impulse. He gave two-and-six to Rubie,

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begging him to buy for him a knife which he would claim on his return journey. Rubie bought the knife; he carried it in his pocket as a trust until one day, long after, when he guessed that the knife was his, and that he had been tipped.

III

There was a reason why it was truly noble of Rubie to have refused a half-crown from whatever source, for he began about this time to be heavily burdened with family cares, having contracted his first family. And this was Alec.

Alec was the first family ever Rubie had, and we know him for that because upon his advent Rubie is beset by financial care. Yes, in the person of that little brother the incubus of family is first settled upon Rubie. And this is to dismiss as not material the family that had

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been established for him in the letter from London. We never entertained that family, though Rubie did. He had paid a half-crown for it, in answer to an advertisement in a long-forgotten newspaper. "The name and the photograph of your future wife, and the number of your children, revealed for two-and-six." And there, sure enough, in the first letter Rubie remembers ever to have received, and brought all the way from London in a mail-pouch, the picture of "Amy" and the sum of three children! Indeed, he did not at all dismiss them: he was perfectly agreeable to them. But he was resigned to an interval, with the photograph of Amy for solace. And in the interval there was Alec.

This little boy must have stolen very softly upon Rubie, who cannot remember the day that he was born, or anything about him very compelling, until

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he was something like a year old. "Our mother cared for him at first, of course," says the old gentleman, in excuse of Rubie's long indifference to Alec. But once assumed, how complete was his devotion to his family! It must have been then that Rubie and his two brothers recognized Alec for a minister — nothing less. Yes, there were they, just common bodies altogether, one a farm-hand and one a carpenter's apprentice and one a ticket-seller, who received upon a given day some sure token — and we wonder what it can have been — that little Alec was to be a minister.

With this illumination, began for Jimmie and Murdo and Rubie those financial anxieties that are the true mark of the family state, and for which Rubie had so complete a vocation. "Between us we were to care for him, to dress him, to teach him and to send him to col-

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lege," says the old gentleman, of the only partnership he ever entered. Rubie was to teach him! Oh, the Hieland pride of it, to be keeping a minister! And oh, the terrible cost of it, with wages what they were! It just couldn't be done in the village of three corners. One of them must go away! Rubie it was who must go away. He, who could never let his darling out of his sight, must go away. Terrible it was, and thrilling too, to go away. Other boys went away, to America and to Australia. News came back of them that they prospered, but they never came back. They were too young to come back, that was why. An old man came back after forty years in America. Forty years in America he was, and came back loving to talk and to answer questions. The old gentleman says that he can see him still among a group of lads all asking questions about the Indians, according

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to Cooper, and about slavery, based upon "Lena Rivers."

We cannot conceal our surprise at "Lena Rivers." We are so snobbish that we cannot conceal it. But the old gentleman is ready to retail that story by Mary Holmes with an imperishable appreciation. To evade Lena Rivers we have to acknowledge that we have met her before. No need, we say, to repeat the introduction; it is only that we had never thought to meet her here — Egeria to a flock of Highland lads, and pointing them to America.

The three of them, says the old gentleman of his brothers and himself, turned this way and that to establish the future of their little minister, and Rubie was for running away to enlist. Or it was Rannie Fraser made the plan, for he was a genius; and it was Rubie bought the tickets, this being in his line; and it was

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Rubie's mother spoked the wheel of Rubie's escape, that being in the maternal line. The way she did it was this, and the way of it was so simple that we are dazzled by it: she took Rubie for a walk. On the very day of the flight, and at the very hour for which Rubie had a ticket, she took him for a walk. They just walked and walked, with never a word to the point, until the train was gone, and the other lads — for there were others — were gone with it. And that is why Rannie Fraser is buried in Egypt, and Rubie is still catching trains.

That was the day of his mother's great success. But she could n't keep it up — you must guess as much, and that one day you will find her putting Rubie's little oddments — terribly quaint they are, too — in a box of his father's making; and that Rubie would be buying a

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ticket of himself for a world far wider and far stranger than the world we know.

I understand from the old gentleman that it is an uncanny thing to leave home. There is a day that you need not look for on any kindly calendar. They could never bear to print the date of that day. And there is an hour that is neither morning nor afternoon nor any known hour, and that is the hour they see you off. You had not known that the hour was to be as it is. You wonder of what you can have been thinking, to have contracted on such a day to meet such an hour. But there you are, and you are in the train. You who have sold tickets for so long, thinking light of it, are now bound by a ticket to an unlooked-for adventure — you are to say good-bye.

The family is there and the neighbors are there. They make you little presents. You look at them from the open window

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of the carriage, and oh, you see them! You begin to bleed internally, and you look at your mother, and you know that a sword has pierced her own soul also. You look at little Alec, and he takes his little white cravat off his neck. He holds it up to you from the platform. He is making you a present. It is his little present to you. And then a curious thing happens: the train begins to move. They all slip away. And you have Alec's cravat in your hand.

Yes, that was little Alec. We know the sort of child he was. He was of those immortal children who die and who live forever. And nothing will appease them. You may name ships for them and hospitals for them and rescue homes for them and orphanages for them, and still they will be pushing their lovers with their little phantom hands, to climb by ladders of human endeavor to fetch the

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moon for them. Before they die, they are so tender that you never guess the strength of them; only by some little gesture or an aspect they warn you, while they live, of all they mean to drive you to. In their lives they buy you with some unforgettable light grace, and in their deaths they use the thing they have bought. There was Rubie leaning out of a car-window and Alec buying him forever with a little white cravat. And Rubie thinking himself so free and all, going away so brave, so wealthy, with five pounds in his pocket, thinking to meet Indians in a great level forest, never guessing yet that a postman was so soon to trace him along a new way to a new door, and to tell him that Alec was dead and had bought him with the cravat. No, Rubie did not think at all as yet of the wonder and the anguish of letters, or of the feet of postmen.

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I

WHEN the old gentleman left home, all the family had their pictures taken. That was their way of keeping him company, who was then so young, on his journeys that were to be so far. These pictures have been perfectly faithful; they keep him company to this day. And among them is one of himself looking lost. The old gentleman says that this lost look of Rubie is all due to the coat: it was a borrowed coat, his own not being fine enough for the immortalities of a portrait, and it was too big for him. Here, we claim, is where Rubie was lost — in the borrowed coat. For the young man who took ship at Glasgow was named Robert; he was aged nineteen, hailed

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from the East Highlands, and had all the documents of Rubie and all Rubie's savings in his pocket. But never a man on the Emergency Exchange Passenger S.S. Venezia had sight or sound of Rubie. Robert it was.

And Robert began at once to experience the most extreme adventures. For overture there was an unparalleled tempest. One of us is competitive by nature and has spent the prime of life upon the sea looking for another such tempest, and in vain. The Venezia was twenty-one days crossing the Atlantic; on the seventh day out the sun found her still off the coast of Galway. Robert exceeded in another sense — he was more seasick than you or I can ever hope to be. In that cabin, where twenty of the ship's forty passengers were seasick, Robert was the most so.

This was a winter of a voyage, in the

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very valley of the waters. A lamp hung from the ceiling of that cabin. A steward with punctual cruelty brought in food; and, on a day worse than other days, the news that the captain had been heard to say that "She could not stand much more of this."

Horrible rumor! The one of us who is competitive and seafaring remembers — But oh, hush, and never mind — do listen to the flute! For in a bunk of that cabin on that ship so doomed by the captain and the steward, there is a man who plays the flute! "The Flowers of Edinburgh" — there they float, on all those days of storm and strangeness, like little straws of melody for Robert to catch at; and that piping is a magic all intact between him and the whinings of the little ship and the sounds of the great sea.

At the fag end of that long voyage, and to the old gentleman's quite obvious

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present satisfaction, there was a shortage of rations. You got your hardtack from a cabin on deck and your butter from another deck-cabin, and that was all you got. And when you were twenty-one days out, you observed by the sun that you were sailing east. This was the "emergency passenger exchange" feature of the Venezia, operating on the grounds of a shortage of rations. The passengers were to be landed at St. John, New Brunswick.

Robert, with a ticket for New York in his pocket, was sent down the ship's ladder to the soil of the New World. The old gentleman claims that he noted at once the great tides in that bay. You see how clever he was. There were no formalities in landing, but the authorities laid hands at once on all such incomers, requiring them to drill to meet the Fenians, who had just raided Indian Island. Our wise

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Robert evolved the idea that St. John was no port for him; and he who went down the ship's ladder to the dock in the morning was to be seen, later in the day, looking very innocent, and climbing down a ladder from the dock to the ship's deck. This ladder effect was due, explains the old gentleman with something of Robert's relish, to the great tides in that bay.

He debarked at Windsor, Nova Scotia, meaning to go from there inland to relatives of his. He slept the night in this port, the first night ever he slept in a hotel. With the evening he felt homesick, and he went down to walk by the sea. Now, as all exiles know, a stroll by the sea is the most appealing cure for homesickness — and the worst. "I found a little marble on the beach," says the old gentleman; "I picked it up and I cherished it — then and for long after."

"How do you mean — you cherished

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it?" we ask, thinking to pluck out the heart of this emotional word.

But the old gentleman says, "Oh, I was homesick!" and goes back to his bed in the tavern with a marble for company in his pocket.

In the morning he took train for Truro. "I had just money enough for my ticket," says the old gentleman briskly. We register a falling barometer, but the weather will not alter; it is springtime in Nova Scotia, where Robert takes note, through a car-window, of thrifty farms. It is springtime at Halifax Junction, where Robert is to wait fasting. But the ticket agent, about to go home for his dinner, observes him, and with an extraordinary intuition, guesses him to be fresh from the old country. Yes, and from within four miles of the agent's old home Robert proves to be — for which cogent reason he is asked to dinner.

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We relax — he is not to go hungry. We tremble when he makes his demure refusals; we are thinking that the ticket agent will take him at his word and leave him to starve there under the bright skies of Halifax Junction and among those notable thrifty farms. But no, says the old gentleman, “we were both from the Highlands, and that was manners.” Moreover, he assures us, feeling our extreme financial agitation, that he personally never had the least concern. He was always able, he tells us, to put this and that together. But if there were no this or that, we urge, and are told: “Well, then I would just have to devise!” And he tells us how, on the train out from Halifax Junction, he sold his silver watch-chain.

We did not know till now that he had a silver chain; but yes, all this time he has been wearing a chain and we have not

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observed it. A present from his brother Murdo it was; it went round his neck and hung all over the front of him. We cannot think how it could have escaped us. You may judge for yourself of the effect of it when I tell you that the train conductor coveted it and bought it of him for ten shillings. Was ten shillings the worth of it, we cynically wonder. But the old gentleman is perfectly satisfied: ten shillings was money in the spring of 1866.

From Truro he bought a seat in a stage-coach for the rest of his journey. A sixpence remained. The friends he made in the stage-coach named the farmsteads by the way, and he with sixpence in his pocket rejoices upon this — that these farms are tilled by their owners.

“It was a shining day of spring,” says the old gentleman, “very bright, and by the roadside in that brilliant light I saw

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a little church standing in a little cemetery. And I thought, 'If I should die in this country I'd like to be buried here!'" And he looks at us with smiling and embarrassed eyes.

We think that, upon the whole, and after his many years and his much wandering, this can hardly be said to qualify as a typical Celtic premonition, and we are haunted rather by the lone sixpence. A little, too, by our Robert's bland trust of his unknown relatives.

II

The coach drops him at the very door. He knocks. We get him to agree that he was — well, apprehensive. A good woman opens the door, and he enters the house. He sleeps that night in the room of an absent son — "When my son went away" is the way of it, and the going away of that son was aboard the City of

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Boston of the Inman Line. Long gone she then was, and never heard of to this day. "I was very sorry for that woman," says the old gentleman, who remembers to be pitiful after all these years. She was a good woman, he tells us, but the man was a Morrisonian. The Morrisonians, it appears, were a sect loving to argue about religion — a subject on which Robert had never yet argued or heard an argument. This new thing he observed in his relative; and another thing he observed.

He went with his uncle for a morning stroll. And coming to a tavern, his uncle said he 'd be having a dram if he had a sixpence, but that he had come out with none. Had Robert a sixpence?

Robert, as we know, had a sixpence. Standing by the bar, he paid for the dram; it was his first purchase in America. Two portions were poured out and

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his uncle drank both, Robert being a teetotaler.

“I seemed to see a dark shadow coming over the faces of all men,” says the old gentleman, making a gesture with his hand; “I can see it coming now.” Highland custom was liberal and he had to give the sixpence; but he claims that he can still remember fishing for it — “a poor little thing in the emptiness of my trousers pocket.”

He then felt, he says, his first touch of caution — of disappointment in his fellow men. If *his uncle* would do that, thought he, then what will not others do?

At this time Robert was in his twentieth year.

He seems not to have slept often in the room of “my son who went away.” From these relatives he went on to others, without, so far as we can find, a sixpence in his pocket. And of these latter, with

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whom he stayed a year or more, the old gentleman would have us know their every aspect and condition: the manner of their house and farm; that they were unmarried (a brother and sister they were); that she did Robert's mending; that they had long prayers of a morning and evening; that he had been a passionate fiddler until this idolatrous frenzy was repented of, when he put his heel through his darling fiddle. There were the awesome remains of the sacrifice to be seen about the house — very afflicting. And that, so far as Robert was concerned, they grudged him nothing — from the never-failing farthing they gave him of a Sunday, that he might feel no shame when the Elder passed the plate, to the offer they made him at the last, that if he would stay with them he should have the farm.

Often we have heard tell of that farm,

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but the farthing is all new to us. We are terribly impressed by that farthing — it is a little lantern shining upon our own past, by which we see a group of ourselves more grown up than we now are, more finely dressed, about to go to church, and much approved by the old gentleman, who detains us long enough to fish a coin from his pocket — and this is for the one of us who is a guest.

“For the collection,” says the old gentleman benignly, and sure that all is plain. Now, indeed, by the light of the farthing all is plain: we know now where he learned that gesture, and that it is the very best of the gestures of that never-to-be-forgotten gentleness of long ago. It is strange, but that farthing has enslaved us for the Francie Henrys — this was their name — more than all their offers of the farm.

Robert stayed in the house of the

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broken fiddle for more than a year, and these things happened to him: —

He did not fall in love. (The old gentleman does not volunteer this, but affirms it with a kind of startled surprise, under cross-examination.) No. He began to shave, which he should have done before.

He went to school, where he made friends; and he taught school, where he made friends.

He read a book about the Christian brotherhood, and was so uplifted by it that he acclaimed the very first man he met upon the highway as a Christian brother. He can still see himself walking abroad in a bright sunlight, gaining upon a man of whom he said to himself, in his heart, "If he is a Christian he is my brother!" And he was, a Christian and a carpenter, both of which facts were forthcoming and satisfactory. They walk

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away together, spiritually arm in arm. We seem to see them walking away together in that morning light, until suddenly, when they are very small and far away, we laugh — because we remember where we have seen them before, and it was in the “Pilgrim’s Progress.”

Robert joined the church in these days, whether before the dawn of his day of Christian brotherhood or after — at least upon a glimmer of that same illumination. Because, he was wondering, did he dare, who was so wicked, aspire to such a privilege, when his eye fell upon Jimmie Cameron, who sat between himself and the minister. Now Robert knew his Jimmie, and thinks he to himself, “I’m as good as Jimmie Cameron anyway!” Upon which conclusion he joined the church.

With the earning of his school-term he bought a suit of clothes — a tailor made

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them — and an overcoat. Do not minimize these adventures.

And among the many letters got by Robert from the old country, be prepared for the fateful letters — so like other letters when the postman brings them to the door, so different when you release them! Little Alec is dead, writes his mother. And his brother Murdo writes that little Alec is dead, but that, if Robert will send on the passage-money for Jimmie, that brother will come to the new country, where he will make a wage that will educate Robert. For Robert is to be the minister, now that little Alec is dead.

Robert sends on what money he has. It is a good thing, is n't it, that he has joined the church and has bought a new suit of clothes — he that is so suddenly called to the ministry! And about the passage-money the old gentleman tells us that, when it came to hand in that High-

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land village, it was just in time to bury Jimmie. We look at those photographs, — of Alec, so small and wise, being bigger than he was on a footstool, and of Jimmie, so young, so rustic, so debonair, so Scotch bonnie, — and we wonder how Robert ever kept his faith in savings. But he did, and Murdo writes that, if only enough can be saved for the passage, he himself will come to earn the makings of the minister.

The old gentleman will not have it that Robert was shattered. But there he is, moving on and away from that Nova Scotian village where you get sad letters and learn that the young may die. He will not stay there — no, not for a farm.

III

The old gentleman, when we have come to this point in the things he remembers, remembers that he had for a

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long time a wish to be a toll-keeper. He saw himself, he says, tipped back in a chair and reading a book. When he would be hailed in his dream by a traveler, he would come to earth and collect the toll; but that well-trained traveler would pass on, and he would read his book again.

It is plain to see, when this aspiration is recalled, that it is not all dead. "It would certainly be a pleasant life," muses the old gentleman. But we cannot leave him there, lolling at the gate of a dream, while Robert waits to get away, and the Francie Henrys, having packed his box with dainties, suffer the moment of farewell.

Robert takes ship from St. John for Boston. Their first call was at Eastport, Maine. It was a jewel of a morning, a late September morning, and it was, he says, as if he had never seen an autumn day before. He looks at that enchanting

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shore. And he writes a letter to his father all about the "Country of the Yankees," and that, however shrewd they are (these were the *clichés* of that September day in 1867), he, Robert, knows how many pence there are to the sixpence!

Having reassured himself by the touch of the written word of his pebbles and his sling, he hangs upon the rail to watch the landing. And Miss Hare comes aboard.

Of the extraordinary personality of Miss Hare I will say at once that the old gentleman has never since that day seen a well-dressed woman but he has thought of Miss Hare. She was then for him, and is to-day, the glass of fashion and the mould of form. And she was more — just as Titian knows that there is more than one woman in a beautiful woman and paints her two upon the fountain's brim. Well, here comes Miss Hare, and she moves in a little company.

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“She had a novel manner,” says the old gentleman; “it was the United States manner. Her carriage was very striking and different from the carriage of the Provinces. Her dress was peculiar to me: her skirt was one of those skirts cut in four panels from nothing [this nothing would seem to have been her waist] to a good flare; it was gray with a sheen on it. It was not very wide. I looked at that dress as if I were going to make another like it. She was a slim tall girl with gray eyes. Her face was not round. So attractive she was and so novel, that any young man would have looked at her more than once or twice.” And the old gentleman says further that in any country he would have been interested in the men and women, and most particularly in the young girls.

“We sailed along,” he tells us, “and I looked at her from time to time. She had

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no interest in me.” We note this, and we note further that, by eliminations of which the old gentleman can still give the count, beginning in the saloon where the attendants withdraw singly, to last withdrawals on the deck, Robert is left alone at last with Miss Hare. They sit by the rail in the autumn night, while the ship’s bell strikes the hour. Eight bells, and Miss Hare is still telling Robert the story of “The Minister’s Wooing.” Yes, that is the tale she told him — the so fashionable and so beautiful and so affable Miss Hare. We do rejoice that Robert, besides his new suit, had bought an overcoat.

There was a maiden lady on that boat, and she was a distant relative of Robert. How came she to know of the condescensions of Miss Hare? And why must she next morning upbraid him for them? “Don’t be thinking to lift your eyes so high,” she tells Robert; and that Miss

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Hare would never take a serious thought of a poor young man like him! The old gentleman, in recalling this would-be assassin, has the customary injured air of the man who has been accused of more serious intentions than he has entertained; and you may see to this day, on the margin of his bright memory of this super encounter, the print of an alien thumb.

It was late afternoon when Robert, landing in Boston, paid the classic dollar. You paid a dollar in those days for the privilege of entering the United States. The old gentleman makes gestures at this point — impassioned gestures, calculated to startle our attention. We must know, if he can make us know, the value of what Robert got for his dollar; and his emotion quite visibly beats against the cage of his control while he tells us that thirteen battles were fought within sight of Stirling Castle, — all of them for Liberty, — and

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here you are, in September of 1867, buying Liberty for a dollar!

We are the friends of the bridegroom and we make our little gestures of appreciation of that joy. We do not minimize it, but we know that Robert is to be a long time in America savoring the fruits of that dollar, and we want to hear at once the tale of the famous necktie bought in Boston. Before we leave Boston we must buy him that tie.

The old gentleman explains that the tie was bought in Michigan, and for this or for other reasons, he leaves Boston that very afternoon, traveling all night to Albany — shut up in the prison of the train from the wonders of these United States. A late thunder-shower beat upon that train and awed him, who was not bred to such storms. And a fellow passenger came, and sat beside him, speaking of the Deity and of the things of Friend-

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ship. How kind that was, we think; and we think we see him sitting all lonely in that unfamiliar clamor, until this nameless man, caught by some appealing aspect of youth, casts a bridge across to that isolation.

“He told me,” says the old gentleman, “that I must learn to make a friend of God and to be friendly to my fellow man; then I would never lack for friends.”

With the morning he was in Albany, and all that day — he was twenty-four hours between Albany and Toledo — he marveled at the United States. There through the car-window was the Mohawk Valley, there were the clean fields, the corn in shock and the colored pumpkins, the towns with their classic names, and everywhere, in town and field and woodland, the bright last embers of our year. First adventures, claims the old gentleman, not only live

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accurately in memory, but 'they shine.

Robert saw hunters come aboard the train with braces of rabbits; free as air, they were, in these United States, who in the old country might well have been in prison for poaching; and he, who had never poached or had a heart for shooting, yet felt a sense of liberation. There was a boy aboard that train who was called the Butcher Boy; he sold nuts that were called beechnuts. He had been in the Civil War. Robert ate his nuts, while he listened to his adventures, and was very much in the United States.

In the old Toledo station he is laughed at by a girl because he calls for a tart that is a pie. "Well, then, that pie." "*All* of it?" mocking youth asks of youth. And youth with dignity inquires as to the custom: what portion is it customary to sell? And buys the fourth, as per specifications.

A FORTUNATE YOUTH

IV

Fortified by this customary section of pie, and by more, we trust, that the old gentleman has forgotten, Robert went on from Toledo to a town in Michigan. He had an uncle in that town, and we know how uncles draw him. This one was of the nobler sort. "He was brusque," says the old gentleman, "but he was never brusque to me." And here Robert found his first job in America — he sold wild turkeys for Thanksgiving. Here, too, he bought the necktie.

There was a young lady among his relatives who loathed his tie and said so. How pliable he was, you may guess, when I tell you that he agreed to buy another. And how he suffered, you should know, when he was asked four shillings for the new one. Now Robert knew — you remember he said so — how many

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pence there are to the sixpence, and he knew besides how shrewd the Yankees are, and that you must never give what you are asked. So he just made a feint of moving away from the counter. And the clerk called after him, "What will you give for it?" Aha, thinks Robert, thrilled to his marrow by this encounter of Greek with Greek; and he says that he will give sixty cents. Which he does.

The tie is much admired, and its financial history is related, with Robert staged to centre, outwitting the Shrewd Yankee. "But it was only fifty cents he asked you!" cries the young lady. For in Michigan in those days there were just twelve and a half cents to the shilling. You see for yourself how hard it was in 1867 to outwit the Shrewd Yankees.

Well, you need not always be outwitting them. With a teacher's diploma in your pocket, you ride out into the au-

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tumn air and you pick up your living by the roadside. It is a November day; you borrow your uncle's pony; above your necktie you look with your young eyes to right and left for your fortune; and when you have ridden seven miles into the country, you see a brick school-house at a four corners. You hail a man and ask is it a vacant school; and it is. And if you will just be going to a farmhouse at the corners, you will be hearing something to your advantage.

You go. And that very night you meet with the School Board. There is something about you that dazzles them — it is a perfect case of Lohengrin, with a pony for swan. You are to teach four months; you are to be paid one hundred and twenty dollars, and you are to “board round.”

Thus Robert came to anchor for a winter of which the old gentleman says that

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there are no bitter memories, unless of the chill of the guest-rooms where he boarded round. All those rooms were cold. But there was food in abundance; there was firewood for jolly big black stoves; there were boys and girls slipping along in sleighs between the snow and the moon, warm and laughing in the straw. There were spelling-bees, and this is why our elders are so infallible. And of a Sunday there was a meeting of Spiritualists in the schoolhouse, and there was much post-war talk of Spiritualism in that robust community. But Robert, who came of a race that sees ghosts, and whose feeling for the ghostly was of a deep and Celtic dye, was not intrigued by these facile occult adventures.

He was busy with his school, and he was busy trying to correct his accent. He dearly wished to be like the people among whom he lived, and particularly

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he wished to be like the Pennsylvania Dutch. He aimed, it seems, to please. Having aimed for four months at this unique mark, and spring having rounded out his school-term, there is a stroke of the bell, and Robert might infer, we claim, that he has hit the bull's-eye. For on the day of the closing of school all the pupils — there were sixty pupils — kissed their teacher.

The old gentleman, to prove this phenomenon, produces a sheaf of tintypes. There they are, boys and girls, and all with a tinge of rose upon their cheeks to prove that they kissed their teacher. One of these is little Johnny Skinner; and oh, he looks like Alec! All the four months of that winter he looked like Alec, and here is the picture of him after fifty years — still looking like Alec, the two of them looking alike to this day.

Outside the schoolhouse there is the

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most beautiful spring weather. And in that beautiful weather there flourishes the most beautiful larch tree. The immortal beauty of this tree, and a memory of Robert worshiping it, are the last of the old gentleman's memories of the four corners. "And how," he muses, "can we have had such golden weather in a Michigan spring!"

However that may be, and we confess to a sophisticated wonder ourselves, Robert makes back to his uncle in golden weather, with gold in his pocket and with a golden word in his mouth. For it is in this spring that he begins to sing about college. He is going to college.

"I am saying good-bye," he tells his uncle, "because I am going to college." For this song is the song of migration.

And his uncle says, with exactly the fervor of the Francie Henrys when they

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offered him the farm, that he will educate Robert for a doctor.

“But I mean to be a minister!” says Robert.

And his uncle looks at him. Presently he asks, does Robert want to know what he thinks of him? And he tells him. Now I know that you want to know what his uncle thought of Robert; but I cannot just tell you with the old gentleman listening in. For he thought that Robert was a fool of a classic type.

And that was the end of uncles so far as Robert was concerned, and of all relatives whatsoever, except those unforgettable ones who write letters from the East Highlands and who think it just gran’ to be a minister. With the pictures of these and the tintypes of his sixty pupils Robert moves forever out of the zone of uncles.

But of this latter one the old gentle-

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man thinks long, sighing at last and saying, "He was brusque, but he never was brusque with me."

"How fortunate you were!" we tell our old gentleman.

THE WAGES OF YOUTH

I

DETROIT in 1868, says the old gentleman, was different. Many a true Detroiter has told us this, and we know by hearsay of that vanished golden age. Robert at twenty-one was there in time. In that far superior Detroit he set about to earn a living, and this is what offered. He might have been a baggage-man, had he not explained that he must leave in September to enter college. But for this indiscretion again, he might have been a rough carpenter working for the government in the lighthouses along the Lake shore. And at last he signed up as purser aboard the *Sea Bird*, plying between Cleveland and Toledo. With Robert waiting to board her as purser, the *Sea Bird* burned to the water's edge.

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Without a harsh word for Detroit, Robert went west to Chicago. And almost at once he begins to make that city over. Many a thing he did for Chicago before he became a minister, and this is the first: he worked for a month on the new directory.

The critical cases were given to Robert, claims the old gentleman, because he had a way with him. With this way of his he came to be in strange houses — the houses of foreigners who suspected the uses of the census, the houses of irritable housewives loath to leave their work. And, on a day, the house of a woman in a decent dress who bids him be seated. He takes out his little book to list the inhabitants of that house, and he observes as they pass the door that they look in at him, and that they are girls. Two of them, more curious than the others, come in and eye him closely.

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“When the madame told them what I wanted,” says the old gentleman, “and that I had come to list them, they laughed and rushed away. And then she said to me, ‘Young man, this is no place for you.’ She said it very kindly, too.”

Such segregations were new to Robert, who pondered them on that day of '68; but the old gentleman at this end of time thinks rather of that maternal kindness in that least likely place.

Having put Chicago, red lights and all, upon the map, young Robert enters a box-factory, and here he meets with his first machine. There was such a lack of affinity between him and a machine as cannot be put in words. We make out that there was no heart in that machine. For a week he took away the boards it threw him with an incredible punctuality and without let or breathing. The heels of his one pair of shoes wore away in the

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service of that machine, and still without ceasing he slaved. Until on the morning of the sixth day he just *could n't* go to work. He *could n't*. He sacrificed that blood-money, packed his carpet-bag, and set out on a country road to the south of Chicago. There was room on that spring day in the prairie lands about the city of Chicago for the escape of a lad from a box-machine.

Young like that, and with your carpet-bag in your hand and the prairies all before you, you cannot do better than trust to a man with a wagon. A taxi could never do as much for you — never. Seated by the man in his wagon you tell him what you need and he tells you where it may be had. At the cross-roads it is to be had, and he drops you there.

Sure enough, you sleep that night under a farmer's roof, — the roof provided

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for you by the man with the wagon, — and this in spite of the judgment passed upon you by the farmer's wife, which is adverse. She is heard to tell her husband that you are no farm-hand, but just a shop-clerk. Could a taxi driver have put you to bed in that house?

Because of a way he had with a given horse, a poor temperamental mare, Robert worked all summer on that farm. And the day he remembers well was the fourth of July. Yes, and the day after. Very early on the morning of the fourth of July the farmer and his wife and the other hired hand — for there was another — went away to Chicago. They went to celebrate the Fourth, and the hired hand wore Robert's best trousers. He was an Austrian, and bigger than Robert by a good deal; but, never mind, he had begged the loan of the trousers and they just *had* to fit.

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Robert had a long, delicious, solitary day cultivating corn. Not being an experienced American, he knew no better than to work on the Fourth of July. No bigger than usual, — smaller indeed than usual, — we see him at the very heart of the wide prairie summer, busy in the corn, and the odd sound we hear is himself singing. He sang “Nancy Lee” all day, says the old gentleman, complacently; he had just learned to sing it. And late that night, when the farmer returned, the Austrian was not with him.

The trousers!

On the morning of the fifth, Robert on the temperamental mare set out to find his trousers. “What, in all Chicago?” we ask. But no, Robert thought he would know where to look: he would look in the saloons. You see how wise he was for a teetotaler. And in the very first saloon, on the outskirts of the town, there were

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indeed the trousers. They were cleaning out the saloon, after the wreckage of the Fourth. You are to remember what they were — trousers of a very special decency, and Robert meaning to go to college and to be a minister and all!

Robert certainly had a way with tipsy men, for there are the two of them, going away from the saloon and back to the farm. Robert on his horse rides to the rear of the trousers that are, oh, so pitiful! They pitifully halt and stumble. And if presently you think you see the trousers a-horseback, the beggar riding and Robert afoot, you are right; for so it is, the old gentleman confesses it. And just as you foresaw, the beggar gives the mare a cut and off they go at full gallop, back again to the pit from which the trousers have been dugged. And it is all to be done over, with the difference that Robert rides, and it is evening.

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II

On a day in September Robert asked for his wages, as he must now be going to college. Forty-two dollars the farmer owed him, and well he knew that his farm-hand must be going to college, and when. But never a cent would he be paying him then, for there was his hay, said he, in the field. And there for all of Robert it is standing to this day.

At the crossroads Robert sat down by his carpet-bag and took account of the five cents in his pocket. He sits and sits, looking up and down the road that is empty in the September sunlight, and presently he feels a tear.

“Oh, but *why?*” we exclaim, terribly upset; because by now we are inured to poverty and we had banked on Robert not to cry.

“Because I thought there would be a

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man with a wagon," explains the old gentleman, off the top of this remembrance; and then he says that it was a tear of self-pity, Robert's first, and that feeling it there on his cheek, he jumped up and was angry. He starts off with his carpet-bag while we hurry up the man with the wagon — it is a load of hay this time, and not alert.

In those days the street-car came to the end of Archer Avenue. There Robert was dropped by the hay-wagon. And that would have been all right, too, but the fare was six cents, and Robert with five in his pocket! Surely you begin to feel now how wrong it is to add a penny to the five-cent fare. Robert parleys with the conductor of that street-car before he goes aboard; do not think that he is the only lad who has done so, and with shame. Yes, he says that he felt like a beggar when the conductor told him

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to come aboard anyway and "We'll see what we can do." And from the foot of Archer Avenue to the heart of Chicago the conductor ignores Robert, who remembers him to this day. "And that was the day," says the old gentleman, glad to turn from these hard details to romance, "that I entered college." "And you had not a penny," we remind him. But oh, yes, he had; for he collected at once and upon that very day ten dollars that were owing him.

"Now who could have owed you ten dollars?" we ask him. But he has forgotten long ago — some poor fellow, he tells us, and that you must never despair of the return of money you have lent; neither, indeed, must you expect it. And he will tell us strange tales of money returned after many years, — from good men and bad men, — and do we remember the English bride and groom who

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brought a puppy to pay their hard-luck loan?

We remember too, too many of the old gentleman's loans, and we like to forget them. We think it fortunate that his debtor of 1868 paid him ten dollars and not a pup. We bring him back to that September day in the heart of Chicago, and himself about to enter college.

There is nothing adequate in us to feel what the old gentleman so obviously felt — and feels — of the thrilling climactic value of this event. We try to feel it, and we can only feel that here is Youth come at last by desperate ways to his "hunger's rarest food and water ever to his wildest thirst."

We follow him, after his registration, along Cottage Grove Avenue and the railroad track, upon a never-to-be-forgotten walk which he took solely to savor this consummation. But we follow him

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at a distance, not to disturb him with our thoughts of the probable bleakness of the old building where he has registered, and of the odd fancy that has lighted for a celebration upon a railroad track. It must be surely that he has meat to eat that we know not of. And this brings us back to the matter of a living.

“But surely,” we ask him, “you did not let the farmer keep the forty dollars you had earned?”

That he did not. On every Saturday afternoon for eight weeks he dunned that farmer, from whom on each visit he received five dollars. And with this and the money he earned from delivering the *Chicago Republican*, he lived. He rose at four and delivered papers until eight, and he lived, we are begged to believe, uncommonly well. And he was a great walker! Let us hope so. And that to this

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day, when he sees a lad at a meal of pancakes and coffee in a restaurant, he thinks of himself in those wonderful academic days. It was then, he tells us, that he fell into his cherished way of working late at night. And in those days, too, he made friends.

This is the way he made a friend in church: he was standing in the aisle while the minister was praying, and he saw — don't ask him how — a pair of shoes beside his own. They were old country shoes. And when the prayer was done, he looked up from the shoes into the face of a youth like himself, and that was the beginning of a friendship.

There is this about selling newspapers — you don't keep it up. All the most interesting newsboys are ex-newsboys. They may have loved the calling that had them up before the dawn, but for financial reasons they have left it, little

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materialists that they are. And Robert was like that. On a day in November, the sun having risen later than usual on that day, he set out to get him a new job.

“I thought I would go along South Water Street,” says the old gentleman, “and climb every stair. At the corner of Wells Street and at the top of the first stair I saw an open door, and at a table, with his back to the door, a man writing like thunder. He wore a slouch hat. He heard my feet and that I paused at the door, and he said, but he did not turn around, —

“Well, what can I do for *you*?”

“I want a job, sir.”

“What can you do?”

“Anything, sir.”

“We don’t want *you*, sir!” came the instant report from that man, who never turned to look at our Robert at the door.

One of the lovers of our old gentleman

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begs to know why in all these words about him there is no word of his eyes and his voice. And at this reproach we claim that we are saving them up. But in our hearts we wonder how could that man in the slouch hat not have turned to the voice at the door? For then he would have seen the eyes — and who knows? But no, there he is through all the years, never turning, and writing like thunder.

Now Robert going down the stairs is saying to himself, “There must be a *reason!* He did n’t look at me, so it was n’t that. Or ask me other questions. There must be a *reason!*” And before he went up the next stair he thought he had light.

There, in an office full of youths addressing envelopes, Robert begs to speak to Mr. Wells. “How did you know his name was Wells?” we ask the old gentle-

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man, who says, "The name was on the door." And presently he says to Mr. Wells: —

"I want a job, sir."

"What can you do?"

"I can address envelopes," clips out Robert, little flashes of the new light shining through the chinks of him. And when Mr. Wells says, but that is only boy's work, Robert answers, in the best melodramatic form, "All I want is to earn my bread, sir!"

And so he does: he earns his bread addressing envelopes. But oh, he has such a way with envelopes that his employer remarks it. On the very first pay-day it is remarked, and his life-story is inquired into, and his aims are asked after, and this searching question is put: —

"Can you live on five dollars a week?"

"I have to, sir," says Robert, with exactly the accent that you imagine you

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hear when you are reading these things in a book.

And then you hear that on Monday he is to be made foreman of all those young scribes!

Do you hear that, you who write like thunder, never turning the head?

As foreman he received ten dollars a week, and there was once more money to send home. We seem not to have heard from home this long time, but that is only because the news is too sad. The old gentleman was wishing not to tell us the news, for Murdo is ill and his mother is dead. People will not be wishing to know these things, they are too sad, the old gentleman tells us; and we remark in him the beginning of a secret look and a look of warning. We have a feeling that if we pass too often this way we will come to a door marked, "Strictly Private," and with fresh paint. So we

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withdraw. We turn to the door marked, "Business Only." And there we come upon a figure in the grand manner — and this is My Employer!

There is this difference between My Employer and the statues of frock-coated, estimable men to be seen in parks — he has a heart. He has a most practical and lively interest in young men who go to college. He pays them exorbitant wages, and like Joseph in the car of Pharaoh, they go abroad adorned with the symbols of trust and office. In My Employer's chariot they go abroad, and there is an Ethiopian to drive them. They collect rents. They are all day gone collecting rents, and munching on a lunch put up by the wife of My Employer. Fabulous things happen to them, both of good and of evil. To Robert himself there happened the affair of The Barber Who Would Not Pay His Rent.

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On a Saturday night he would not pay his rent; rather he would pay it on a Monday. And on the Monday his house was not to be found among the houses upon Front Street. Hundreds of detached small houses there were on Front Street, all alike, and among them, neither on that Monday nor thereafter, was there found any timber of number 632, or serpent on a pole, or smell of a barber. The house, I do assure you, had vanished. The old gentleman believes that the barber took it away on wheels, thus breaking the Sabbath; but the Aladdin look of Robert, in these days of the late sixties, makes us wonder.

We had supposed that My Employer's name was Wells, but no, his name is now Forsythe. He is a lawyer. Robert was a present from Mr. Wells to Mr. Forsythe, and there would be mention in the inventory — be sure of it

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— of the eyes and of the voice. And of “thirty-two sound teeth; small but comely; willing; of good habits, and has a way with him. Teetotaler.”

From the day Robert receives ten dollars a week and is delivered over to My Employer, we seem to lose him. He passes and repasses us on his weighty errands in the chariot of Pharaoh, and he would salute us if he saw us, never doubt it; but all his eye is upon My Employer.

When we reproach him with this, as we cannot always forbear to do, he has his reasons. On such a day Long John Wentworth called upon My Employer, and on another day, N. B. Judd. We are to understand from the old gentleman that really nothing of importance occurred in Chicago without the let of My Employer.

“Well, there was the fire,” we suggest;

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and the old gentleman is taken back a bit. He cannot prove that My Employer either provided or prevented the fire. Having brought him to earth, we try to get news of our Robert.

“Do tell us,” we beg, “what Robert lost in the fire!”

And the old gentleman says, taken by surprise like this, — and make what you like of it, —

“That was the summer I had met your mother.” And then with immediate craft he amends, “I lost my mother’s letters.”

And many books he lost, though he saved a dictionary. And this he claims to have observed, standing at the bridge at Wells Street, over which the refugees streamed on that illuminated night — that all the men were talking and talking and talking and all the women were silent. Did you ever? And oh, yes, he

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remembers now that he lost in the fire a valuable stone set in a ring and given him by My Employer!

We give it up. We wait until the day when My Employer calls him to the inner office and makes him the familiar offer — the offer made by the Francie Henrys of the farm and by the eloquent uncle of the doctor's practice. There is the august person of My Employer making the familiar proffering gesture, and Robert once more the gesture of refusal. We know we have him back again, minus the chain of office and the seal-ring lost in the fire. But oh, if you hear a chinking in the pocket of Robert who has returned to us, that is a real chinking, and of more than two bawbees! For a little while there is that chinking, and it is surely an odd sound, a kind of sound of fairy gold soon to vanish by way of the post and other ways.

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III

In those days Robert lived on the second floor of the dormitory of a theological seminary. Often he wearied of Chicago. "I was often homesick then," says the old gentleman. "Oh, I could have painted the heather on the hills and the very rocks among the heather!"

"But all the time you were with your Employer you never said a word of this," we urge; "and we thought — "

"Because it was too sad," says the old gentleman, hoping we will let him off without the story of Katie. But that we could never do — and Robert with a sound of money in his pocket.

It would be on a night of the summer of '72 — not a moonlight night. There were four theological students in the old hall; the rest were on vacation. The old gentleman thinks that there were stars.

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Robert was asleep in his room above the entrance, and he woke suddenly to a cough that was his mother's cough.

"I thought it was my mother coughing," says the old gentleman, "and I knew it was not. I sat up in bed and I heard the cough again. Down at the outer door. I put my head out of the window and there in the starlight I saw a woman. 'Who's there?' I called, and she turned her face up. 'It's me, Rubie,' she said; 'it's Katie.' And it was my sister Katie."

A bed was made for her that night in one of the empty rooms, and there that Highland girl slept after what lonely journeyings. What did they talk of, those two who had been parted now six years? The old gentleman cannot bring himself to tell us. There is not a brother left to him, and of his little sisters here is Katie looking to him for what it is now

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too late for him to do. She was very intelligent, he tells us, and very brave. She had need to be. She was with him six weeks, and of a day in the last of these weeks we have this account. That it was raining. And that Robert was walking up and down his room as a young man does who is making a sermon — and so he was: Robert was making a sermon to preach that very Sunday. And that Katie was not turning her head away from the window at all; she was looking out at the rain. And that she said: —

“Robert, if I should die would you bury me here?”

And that Robert then asked her would she like to be going home now?

And that she said, “O Rubie, I would fine like to be going.”

And they went. At once.

This is how Robert came to go home in the summer of '72. And on the dock

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in New York there came up to him a young Scot with his wife — and would Robert give her over to her mother in Greenock? She was that homesick there was nothing else for it. And it may be three months will do it, the husband thinks.

But why did he pick on Robert? And we are reminded that the whole of them were Scotch, and it would be the white tie. At which, upon looking well at Robert, we do observe that he wears a white tie.

“Did you go second cabin?” we ask.

But no; because of Katie they went first cabin. And when they came to Greenock the mother of the little homesick bride came out in a boat, and the girl, except that Robert restrained her, would have gone over the side before she could get down the ladder. And when they came to their own home village of

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the three corners, there truly it was, and oh, but it was little and wee! All perfect it was, as remembered, but so low and under such a sky as you could lay hands upon. You could never have believed it.

And there is another boy, that cannot be yourself, selling tickets from your very window. The first man you meet in the street is the blacksmith you worked for; and you are glad to see him, but he cannot remember you. He is looking at your white tie and at your young face that is too eager, with the ironic indifference of the aged.

“Don’t you remember me?” you ask him.

And he says, “I canna just seem to remember.”

Ah, well, there are two little sisters in the house; they will trouble to remember who is the young man at the door, with poor Katie come home so soon. They

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cook a haddock for him, remembering gleefully more than they ever knew. But when the young stranger with the white tie knocks on the door of his father's workshop, that old man looks at him long and asks, "Now what micht *ye* be?"

This is the work of six years, plus a white tie.

The old gentleman has little to say of his two weeks in that village. He casts about for pleasing adventures with which to enliven us. He tells us how he knocked upon a door to claim his clean linen, and there across the ironing-table was Euphemia, her skirts kilted to her knees like the Highland girl she was. "You remember," says the old gentleman, "I kissed her once."

And we remember. But surely the memory of one kiss does not make a summer, and we feel a growing bleakness in the village of three corners. We bear

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it as long as we can and then we say,
“Oh, let ’s go home!”

“I was just thinking of that myself,”
says Robert; “but first I must go to see
my old aunt in Nigg.”

When Robert went to see his old aunt
in Nigg, his father went with him. And
it was observed of old Winter that he
talked more to that son of his, home on
visit, than ever he had been known to
talk to another. Aye, wherever they
went together, they talked. On this day
young Robert wore an overcoat. Chilly
he was, most like, and his aunt, thinking
as much, went to a cupboard from which
she brought a brown bottle and two
glasses.

“Three, surely,” we say; but the old
gentleman remembers well that it was
two. And said she, —

“You ’ll have a drop, Robert.”

Robert said, “Not any, thanks.”

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“Aye, lad,” said she, “but you ’re chilly.”

“No, really, aunt,” says our Robert, “I make it a habit not to take it.”

“Ah, but you ’ll tak this, man,” she tells him with an obvious zest; “it ’s *smuggled!*”

“Even so, aunt, do not press me, for I have religious scruples against it.”

Oh dear, oh dear! Who could abide it! “Releegious scruples, is it? Aye, aye!” and she wags her head. “Releegious scruples!” And if a flash from old eyes could blast a white tie, then that tie is blasted. “Nay, it ’s just proud you are, and not wishing to drink with your old aunt!” She busies herself filling the glasses, flicking him with her glance and muttering about “releegious scruples — aye, aye!”

“Now, John,” she says to Robert’s father, “you ’ll tak a drop.” And she

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sits at the table. She folds her hands under her apron. John folds his old hands by his glass. The two of them look at Robert — him of the white tie — and she says in an accent of sharpest irony, “Noo, Robert, you ’ll ask the blessing!”

Robert asks the blessing on the whiskey he would not drink. So much for him and his religious scrupling in the very home and birthplace of that art.

“It was not my conviction vexed her,” explains the old gentleman, “but my manners. If I had never mentioned my scruples at all, but had raised the glass to her and to my father, I need only have said, ‘Slyanche!’ — and that is the old Gaelic toast — to have taken the curse off my abstinence.”

But Robert thought of this too late. We know those words that come to mind too late and can never now be said.

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Odd, is n't it? But Robert cannot remember his second going-away. Too many have gone away before him, who are not there to see him go. He cannot remember was it afternoon or evening, or what it was. But he remembers that, when he came to sail from Greenock, there was that Scotchman's bride at the boat, and she was just begging him to take her home with him, for home is in the West after all.

"She cried and all," says the old gentleman; "but I remembered how her husband had said, 'three months would do it,' and here was no more than two weeks gone. So I left her."

And she crying and all!

There was something very special about the spire of Trinity Church in those days when seen from a ship's deck. You saw it from the Narrows, as you entered New York harbor. It was very

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high — the old gentleman says so. It thrust up into the bright air above the soil of America in a particular way. Robert, still sad from that little wee village of three corners and something strange and haunted there, saw this spire from the ship, and in his heart he felt a thrilling recognition and an appropriation — it was as if he took possession then of his country and of his man's estate. Hail! he said. And oh, he said, farewell. Farewell!

But many a time since, the old gentleman has wished — I have heard him wish it — that Robert had raised his glass to his old aunt and to his father, saying, “Slyanche!”

THE END



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